1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

674 very few serious disputes arise in Abujhmar, where a murder is extremely rare and due usually to some suspicion of
572 black magic. The Bison-horn Maria, on the other hand, is subject to sudden fits of blind rage, especially after he has been taking large quantities of his intoxicating gruel, *landa*, which is anathema to the Hill Marias. In that state he will seize any weapon that comes to hand, whether it be his wife's heavy rice pestle, a log of wood, an axe or a bow and arrow, and murder for the most trivial of reasons; the State Jail at Jagdalpur has always a high percentage of Bison-horn Marias doing time for homicide. He also is capable of nursing his revenge for a long time; a recent example was given by a strapping Bison-horn Maria from Palnar, who, after serving twelve years of a commuted death sentence, soon after his release took the first chance of picking a quarrel with a man whom he considered deliberately to have let him down by not giving evidence in his defence twelve years before, and battered his head in with a heavy bamboo stick. The Bison-horn Maria will in his fury declare an implacable enmity by stalking round his foe's house three times, either plucking straws from the thatch, or whistling the peculiar *su'i* whistle, or throwing some of his own pubic hairs at the house; and murder is the inevitable result. There were twenty-seven murder trials in Bastar between 1917 and 1923, and in eighteen of them the murderers were Bison-horn Marias, but only two of the murders were committed by Hill Marias. About half the Bison-horn Maria murders are committed in *landa* intoxication, and almost the same proportion in sudden fits of rage about nothing; for example, wives often are killed when the husband dislikes his food or it is not ready for him; one even lost her life for refusing to cook for her husband when he woke up hungry in the middle of the night. But there are on record Bison-horn Maria murders committed for all the ordinary sordid and criminal murder motives; the Bison-horn Maria is a man of far stronger feelings than the Hill Maria. The former actually runs amuck on occasion
[158] like the Malay; in two such cases the offender pleaded that he suffered from fits and ran amuck under the delusion, in the one case, of pursuit and, in the other, of possession by evil spirits and of the
628 imminence of a new rebellion. Cain indeed wrote in 1876 that 'blood revenge' had hardly died out in the Godavari valley, and was said to be 'in full exercise' in Bastar. The only apparent case of a hereditary vendetta of which I am aware occurred in Orcha, a Hill Maria village, where a grandfather and his son were murdered at long intervals for suspected witchcraft, while the grandson conveniently fell off a sago-palm tree as soon as he was old enough to claim the hereditary post of *pargana* headman.
692 There is a strong feeling everywhere of an eye for an eye and a tooth

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

XII. Friendships

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The 'official' friendships which are such a common feature of the social life of many castes and tribes in the Central Provinces and Chota Nagpur are not popular among the Muria. This *bode-kiyāna* (friendship-making) is regarded as a Hindu custom and throughout the Jhoria country is practically unknown. In the Kondagaon Tahsil, especially in villages along the main road and in parts of the Bara Dongar Pargana, such friendships are indeed made, but do not play a very important part in the ghotul or in village life.

As in the Central Provinces, when these ceremonial friendships are instituted, the parties to them henceforth stand together and help each other in a very special way.[1]

Dalton says the ties 'are almost as binding as those of marriage'.[2] The parties may not address each other by their ordinary names, though they may continue to use their ghotul titles. Such friendships can only be made between people who are *akonāma* to one another. In certain cases boys and girls can make these friendships with each other, though they are much more common between members of the same sex.

In Bastar the best-known friendships are the *keonra-phul*, the *supāri-phul*, the *sakhi* and the *baru*. I have not found the *jawāra* friendship, though I have occasionally heard of the *gangājal* and *bhajli*. It is said that the *keonra-phul* is made between men and women who stand in a joking relationship to each other as, for example, between a man and his elder brother's wife. A girl often becomes *sakhi* to her father's brother's wife. Boys and girls can be *baru* to each other and there is a line in a song which suggests that they can also become *jai-mongra-phul*:

> He asked me to be his *jai-mongra* flower-friend, mother;
> But I am too shy to be that, mother.

These friendships are initiated by a simple ceremony in the ghotul. Two leaf-cups are made and little lamps are placed in them and lit. The friends wash each other's feet, stand face to face, put flowers behind each other's ears, exchange three times shoots of grain, *supāri*-nut, a little sand or whatever it may be, embrace and greet each other by their new names and salute everyone who is there. They then distribute coconut and liquor.

I have not found many examples of this charming and natural practice. There were such alliances in Binjhli and Alor. At Sidhawand, Pilsai had a *keonra-phul* in the Sirdar and at Masora Phirtu had a friend of the same

[1] This system of friendships in Chota Nagpur and Orissa has been described by Roy, *The Hill Bhuiyas*, pp. 235ff.; *The Kharias*, p. 162; *The Birhors*, pp. 527ff.; *The Oraons*, pp. 396ff. Roy stresses the fact that the aboriginals generally form these alliances with members of other communities, thus indicating that the custom is a borrowed one. Certainly any elaboration seems to indicate external contact: thus the primitive Juang only have the Makro, Sangat and Phulo friendships, and do not take the names of flowers. The Dhurwa-Parja have the custom in a very simplified form. I have not found it at all among the Maria. See also Gordon, op. cit., p. 188, who remarks that after an acquaintance with the people of Bilaspur of fourteen years he 'can recall only one instance in which such a friendship was broken', and adds 'It has been hinted to me that these friendships sometimes result in a community of possessions extending even to a community of wives'. Firth has given an interesting account of such bond-friendships in Tikopia, which he considers 'less striking forms of covenant' than the blood-brotherhood of Africa, but which illustrate 'some aspects of the sociology of co-operation and the very real and immediate advantages of a psychological, economic and social kind which an institutionalized friendship provides, and the moral sanction which attaches to the performance of material, non-ritual services'.—R. Firth, 'Bond-Friendship in Tikopia', *Custom is King* (London, 1936), pp. 259ff.

[2] Dalton, op. cit., p. 353.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 A W32 Gond A W32
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degree. It is worthy of remark that both these boys had been to school. At Sidhawand my wife and I became the *supāri-phul* and *sakhi* of Rame and Pilsai respectively. My *sakhi* certainly takes this friendship and its obligations very seriously indeed. In Sidhawand the Kotwar entered into the *bhāi* relationship with the Nircsa.

If the two friends are to sleep together in the ghotul—this is a Masora and Jamkot custom—they must place a piece of cloth between them. Otherwise 'to sleep together would be a sin'. I do not think we should read a very deep meaning into this; the rule is not intended to prevent homosexual practices which do not exist; the two friends are simply in a religious or magical state to one another.

But apart from such covenanted alliances, there are deep and lasting friendships between chelik and chelik, motiari and motiari, even though these have no formal name and are not officially recognized. But it seems to me that these tend to express themselves in gangs or groups rather than in pairs. The exclusive, passionate, devotion of two boys or two girls to each other would be contrary to the strongly communal nature of the ghotul and indeed of all Muria society.

So although the Padhar and Tahsildar (Pilsai) of the Sidhawand ghotul are *sāthi* (companions) who 'must always be together, must stand by one another, and feel miserable if they don't see each other', their attachment is not exclusive. The Sirdar is always with them, and the three boys sleep together with their motiari in a corner of the ghotul. Boys and girls group themselves according to age; the bigger motiari, who have to do so many things together, naturally spend most of their time together and become great friends. In Jhakri there were several groups of boys and they told us that they had their own secret language and could talk to each other and make jokes without the others knowing anything about it. 'When you are friends, you can all fart together', as one of them said. They would not even tell their secrets to the girls they loved. Even in the *jodidār* ghotul, such groups of boys are said to share their girls with one another, though not, of course, with anyone outside. But it is said that these friendships weaken after marriage, as the friends begin to 'tread the hill of the elders' and to suffer 'the cares of house and door'.

Two famous friends, who have continued to this day, are the former Atkari and Soha, Nari and Tota, of Nayanar, both men of outstanding character, witty, active, genial, popular. In their youth, both were fined for making their motiari, the Tiloka and the Manjaro, pregnant, and have thus borne ever since the name of *jataka*, a Gondi-Halbi word meaning someone 'who takes a thing by force'. They always slept on the same mat in the ghotul, back to back with their motiari on either side of them on separate mats. People talk also of the friendship between Rama, the Sirdar, and Sukder, the Likhen, of Palli. 'They never go anywhere alone: they are always together.'

But, on the whole, such devoted alliances and partnerships are rare. The reasons for this are many. There is, as I have said, the strongly communal and highly organized character of ghotul society. From childhood the Muria are trained to do things together, to move, work, mourn, rejoice as a group. Then there is the strong feeling against jealousy and anything that would promote jealousy. The habit of mind that forces a boy to sleep every night with a different motiari is not likely to encourage him to form an exclusive attachment to a member of his own sex, which would be likely to excite the jealousy of the others. In Alor, the villagers said of two great friends, older men, that 'those two always cut everything in pieces; they disturb the judgements of the panchayat'.

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Any form of partiality is resented by the Muria. We see this in the ghotul which dislikes even a hint of favouritism towards a boy or girl on account of the wealth or rank of the parents. It is the same among the elders. The panchayat, the village mind, must work dispassionately; intensity of personal relationships ruins fair judgement.

When I was discussing this question in Khutgaon, and asked why it was that in that (Kalpatti) pargana there were so few famous friendships, the answer came quite simply: 'Because we are more interested in girls.' Let the European reader of this book pause to reflect how much of his own youth was passed in exclusively male society, what the word 'dormitory' meant to him—as compared to what it means to a Muria!—and he will realize that the kind of friendship that was so important a part of his life at school or the university will obviously have little significance in Bastar.